

Message Text

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ACTION AF-08

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 NEA-10 ISO-00 IO-13 L-03 SS-15 NSC-05

SP-02 CIAE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00 /076 W

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FM AMEMBASSY COTONOU

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9424

USMISSION USUN PRIORITY

INFO AMEMBASSY ABIDJAN

AMEMBASSY ACCRA

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY CONAKRY

AMCONSUL IBADAN

AMEMBASSY KINSASA

AMEMBASSY LAGOS

AMEMBASSY LIBREVILLE

AMEMBASSY LOME

AMEMBASSY NIAMEY

AMEMBASSY OUAGADOUGOU

RUFNPSNMAMEMBASSY PARIS 1633

AMEMBASSY RABAT

C O N F I D E N T I A L COTONOU 0393

PARIS FOR MELONE

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR PINT PORG UNSC DM US

SUBJ: TESTIMONY BEFORE UN FACT FINDING COMMISSION

REF: STATE 39137 (NOTAL)

1. SUMMARY: CHIEFS OF SEVEN DIPLOMATIC MISSIONS RESIDENT IN COTONOU TESTIFIED AS GROUP FEBRUARY 23 BEFORE SPECIAL UNITED NATIONS FACT FINDING COMMISSION INVESTIGATING JANUARY 16 ATTACK ON BENIN. ALTHOUGH NO NEW INFORMATION DISCLOSED, PER REFTEL CONFIDENTIAL

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COMMISSION CHAIRMAN ACCEPTED CHARGE'S INVITATION TO INSPECT DAMAGE TO AMBASSADOR'S RESIDENCE. INITIAL IMPRESSION WAS THAT COMMISSION NOT AWARE THAT WESTERN PROPERTY DAMAGED AND APPEARED PLEASED TO HAVE ADDITIONAL EVIDENCE TO BALANCE FINAL REPORT. END SUMMARY.

2. CHIEFS OF SEVEN DIPLOMATIC MISSIONS (FRANCE, WEST GERMANY,

UNITED STATES, EGYPT, ZAIRE, GHANA, EUROPEAN COMMUNITY) WERE RECEIVED AS A GROUP FEBRUARY 23 BY SPECIAL UN FACT FINDING MISSION INVESTIGATING CIRCUMSTANCES SURROUNDING JANUARY 16 MERCENARY ATTACK ON BENIN. CHIEF OF FACT FINDING MISSION, PANAMA'S PERMANENT REP TO UN, AMBASSADOR JORGE ILLUECA, HAD AGREED TO THIS PROCEDURE FOLLOWING A REQUEST FROM SEVERAL DIPLOMATS WHO WERE AFRAID THAT THOSE TESTIFYING INDIVIDUALLY MIGHT BE MISQUOTED AT A LATER DATE. SOVIETS AND NORTH KOREANS TESTIFIED SEPARATELY.

3. WITH EXCEPTION OF EGYPT AND ZAIRE, ALL STATEMENTS WERE LIMITED TO BRIEF DESCRIPTIONS OF WHAT INDIVIDUALS HAD ACTUALLY SEEN OR HEARD. EGYPT, HOWEVER, INCLUDED A RATHER LONG-WINDED DECLARATION OF SOLIDARITY WITH AFRICAN AND NON-ALIGNED NATIONS AND TOOK OCCASION TO READ INTO RECORD AN EGYPTIAN GOVERNMENT CABLE WHICH HAD NOT BEEN PRINTED IN THE GOVERNMENT DAILY EHUZU. CABLE MERELY REINFORCED AMBASSADOR'S STATEMENT. ZAIRIAN AMBASSADOR DESCRIBED HIS COUNTRY AS ONE WHICH HAD SUFFERED FROM MERCENARY ATTACKS FROM BOTH LEFT AND RIGHT AND USED OCCASION TO CONDEMN ALL KINDS OF MERCENARY ACTIVITY AND INTERVENTION. NEITHER STATEMENT, HOWEVER, TRIED TO FIX SPECIFIC BLAME FOR THE ATTACK. (FYI ZAIRIAN AMBASSADOR TOLD CHARGE PRIVATELY THAT MOBUTU STILL NOT CONVINCED THAT COUP ATTEMPT WAS GENUINE. END FYI)

4. ALTHOUGH CHARGE ORIGINALLY HAD INTENDED TO LIMIT HIMSELF TO SIMPLE VERBAL STATEMENT, JUST PRIOR TO SESSION HE WAS STRONGLY URGED BY MEMBER OF COMMISSION SECRETARIAT TO READ A WRITTEN STATEMENT IN ORDER TO LIMIT UNNECESSARY AND POSSIBLY TENDENTIOUS QUESTIONING. CHARGE, THEREFORE, READ STATEMENT (BEING TRANSMITTED TO DEPT VIA SEPTTEL) NOTING HIS ABSENCE DURING TRAGIC EVENTS AND CONFIDENTIAL

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INVITING MISSION, PER REFTTEL, TO INSPECT DAMAGE TO AMBASSADOR'S RESIDENCE. COMMISSION CHAIRMAN IMMEDIATELY AGREED AND ARRANGED FOR VISIT TO TAKE PLACE SHORTLY AFTER CONCLUSION OF HEARING. APPROXIMATELY AN HOUR LATER THE THREE MEMBERS OF THE SPECIAL MISSION ACCOMPANIED BY BENIN'S AMBASSADOR TO UN THOMAS BOYA AND HIS DEPUTY, PATRICE HOUNGAVOU, SECRETARIAT STAFF AND STENOGRAPHERS, AND BENINESE SOLDIERS WITH MACHINE GUNS ARRIVED AT RESIDENCE. SOLDIERS GRUDGINGLY AGREED TO REMAIN OUTSIDE WHILE CHARGE ESCORTED PARTY AROUND RESIDENCE.

5. MEMBERS OF MISSION CAREFULLY INSPECTED ALL INTERIOR AND EXTERIOR DAMAGE. PANAMANIAN MILITARY OFFICER IN THE GROUP SUCCEEDED IN EXTRACTING A LEAD SLUG WHICH HE IDENTIFIED AS COMING FROM A WEAPON FIRING 7.62 MM AMMUNITION. CHARGE GAVE SLUG TO COMMISSION CHAIRMAN IN EVENT THEO WIKNMS TO ADD IT TO EVIDENCE ALREADY GATHERED. UPON COMPLETION OF INSPECTION AMBASSADOR ULLUECA EXPRESSED HIS PERSONAL THANKS TO CHARGE FOR INVITATION TO VISIT RESIDENCE.

6. COMMENT: IN SUBSEQUENT PRIVATE CONVERSATION, UN SECRETARIAT STAFF MEMBER TOLD CHARGE HE BELIEVED CHAIRMAN HAD PARTICULARLY WELCOMED OPPORTUNITY TO SEE DAMAGE TO RESIDENCE SINCE BENINESE AUTHORITIES HRN TRIED TO LEAD MISSION TO ASSUME THAT NO WESTERN COUNTRY HAD SUFFERED PROPERTY DAMAGE AS RESULT OF ATTACK. HE FELT THAT DAMAGE EXTENSIVE ENOUGH TO HAVE CAUSED SERIOUS INJURY HAD HOUSE BEEN OCCUPIED WOULD ALLOW MISSION TO COUNTER GPRB INSINUATION THAT "CAPITALISTS" HAD BEEN SPARED BY MERCENARY ATTACKERS. THOMPSON

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